

THE QUEERCLOVER CHRONICLES.

BY JOHN BROWNJOHN.

I. MISS MARROWPHAT'S MALTEE.

THOMAS ALSOP, Esq., a small but not unimportant citizen of Queerclover, was walking down the main street of the village with his hands in his pockets and bitterness in his heart. It was May, the month of circuses. "The Greatest Combination Ever on Exhibition in Either Hemisphere" was announced to appear in Queerclover the following week. And Thomas Alsop's father, having been this morning for the first time approached upon the subject, had declined to bestow upon his son the advertised price of admission. Just at the corner of the Green, citizen Tommy fell in with young Prettyman, a New York boy who, with his mother, was visiting in Queerclover.

"Well?" demanded young Prettyman. "What did he say?"

"Said 'twan't no place for boys," responded Tommy, disgustedly.

"Just what Judy said," observed young Prettyman. By "Judy" he meant his mother. For some inconceivable reason (possibly because it was disrespectful and he knew it plagued her) he always called his mother Judy.

"Notwithstanding which" — the speaker continued with great cheerfulness — "I'm going!"

"Where'll you get the money?" asked Tommy.

"Don't know. I'll *get* it somehow, though! Always do."

The conversation reached this point just as they were passing a pretty white cottage with flowers and shrubbery all about it, and a piazza facing the green. On this piazza, as they looked in through the open gateway, a large cat could be seen lying on the mat in the sun. She was of the kind generally known as "maltese," and was particularly noticeable now because of a green vizer or shade which was fastened over one of her eyes, evidently for the purpose of protecting it from the light.

"What's that?" exclaimed young Prettyman.

"That's Miss Marrowphat's maltee," said Tommy.

"Haven't you heard about *her*?"

"What's that she's got on?" asked the other halting and regarding the animal with interest. "What's the matter with her anyway?"

"She pretty near put her eye out fighting, the other night," explained Tommy. "Miss Marrowphat had an eye-doctor out from Boston, an' he fixed it, an' now she has to wear a shade. They thought first she'd have to have a glass eye."

Young Prettyman laughed outright.

"She must think a good deal of her cat," said he.

"I guess she does?" responded Tommy, with warmth. "She thinks more of it than she does of her own children — if she had any. She's brung it up just like other folks do babies. She has a girl to take care of it, an' a carriage for it to ride in — an' it always sets up to the table with her an' has a high chair an' a napkin ring an' a silver spoon of its own. An' she has a gold collar for it, only she don't let her wear it, for fear it'll get stolen. An' she has a little bedroom for it openin' right out o' her's — an' a little bed in it an' a muskeeter bar an' — an' lots o' things. An' whenever it's sick she always sends right off for the doctor. An' since this last accident she's got its life insured for five thousand dollars in the Catskill Mutual."

"Catskill *Grandmother*!" exclaimed young Prettyman. "I don't believe it!"

"That's what my father says, an' he's a lawyer," declared Tommy.

"Hist!" whispered his companion. "There she is now."

They paused near the end of the fence, and looking in through the hedge, saw Miss Marrowphat herself come out of the house and speak to the cat.

"Why, dear," they heard her say, "I'm afraid this hot sun will give you another sick headache. And this light is altogether too strong for your poor eye."

And then they saw her stoop and take up the maltee, and disappear with it inside the door.

"She does think a good deal of it," remarked young Prettyman, after a moment of thoughtful silence.

"I told you she did," said Tommy.

"I say, Alsop," went on the other abruptly. "Do you really want to go to the circus?"

Tommy grew sober in an instant. He evidently *did* really want to go to the circus, though he made no reply in words.

"Well, then," cried his friend, "I know how we can get the money just as easy as falling out of a cherry tree."

"How?" asked Tommy.

"D'you ever hear of Charlie Ross?"

Tommy shook his head.

"There ain't no such boy in Queerclover," said he.

"Humph!" uttered young Prettyman. "He *may* be for all you know. He's never been found anywhere else. But I'll tell you how we can get the money, if you will help."

"How?" again inquired Tommy.

Young Prettyman looked cautiously around. They were some little way past the cottage now, and Miss Marrowphat was nowhere in sight. He got hold of Tommy's arm and drew him nearer.

"I'm going to try my hand at kidnapping!" murmured he.

"What?" asked Tommy, not comprehending at all.

Young Prettyman pulled him nearer still and put his lips close to Tommy's ear:

"*I'm going to kidnap Miss Marrowphat's maltee!*" he said in a loud whisper.

By nine o'clock the next morning it was known all over Queerclover that Miss Marrowphat's maltee was missing. Miss Felicia Funnyfeather, Miss Marrowphat's nearest neighbor and dearest friend was, strangely enough, one of the last to hear of it, and she at once flung her waterproof about her head and shoulders and hastened over to learn the particulars and to condole with her friend.

Miss Marrowphat received her at the door with red eyes.

In many words, interspersed with some sobs, she told her friend the sad story. Angie, the name Miss Marrowphat's Maltee usually went by, had, as usual, been permitted to go out for a few moments, about

nine o'clock the previous evening to get a little fresh air. At half-past nine Maria had gone to the door and called her but she had made no response. At ten Miss Marrowphat herself had stepped out on the piazza, and for a long while, and in the most gentle and persuasive accents, besought her to return to the house. But still there was no sign of the missing one, and Miss Marrowphat had finally gone back, but remaining up all night had from time to time gone to the door and called the cat. This morning a thorough search had been made all about, yet no trace of the lost one discovered.

"And I shall never, never see her any more," said Miss Marrowphat, breaking down entirely.



ON THE WAY TO THE BAND-STAND.

She has only wandered off somewhere," said her friend. "If I were you, I would advertise."

And so saying Miss Funnyfeather, who was dreadfully energetic and practical and cheerful on all occasions, sat down then and there and wrote out an advertisement which was at once taken down to the printing office and printed.

That afternoon at five Tommy Alsop, lying at full length on the grass down in the back garden under the lilac bush, suddenly heard a step behind him. He started up with a little shriek.

"What's the matter with you?" said young Prettyman. "You're white as a sheet."

"Nothing," answered Tommy, looking relieved. "I

really thought at first you were the sheriff sure."

"I do believe you're scared," said young Prettyman. "Have you seen the reward?"

And then, as Tommy did not seem to understand what was meant, the other went on to tell him that there was a big handbill posted on the band-stand in the middle of the Green announcing that a reward of ten dollars would be paid to anyone who would give information leading to the recovery, dead or alive, of Miss Marrowphat's maltee.

Tommy turned a little pale as he listened, but presently a thought struck him.

"Then why can't we return her and get the reward?" suggested he.

"No sir!" uttered his chief, emphatically. "You don't catch *me* that way. I hid my father's seal-skin gloves once, and when he said he'd give anybody half a dollar to find 'em and I went and got 'em, instead of the half dollar he gave me a good lickin' for it." And young Prettyman shook his head very positively, as he repeated. "No sir. You don't catch *me* that way!"

"But I'll tell you what we *will* do," this astute young person went on. "You know how to write, don't you?"

Yes, Tommy, could write. At least he could print. He could make a better capital B than any other fellow in the school.

"Well," said young Prettyman, "you go get a sheet of paper, will you? I want you to write a letter."

So Tommy went into the house for the paper; and then, with the bench in the summer-house for a desk, and at Master Prettyman's dictation, with infinite pains he wrote out the following letter. It is to be regretted the chirography as well as the spelling cannot be reproduced here:

"MiS MaReRfat yoR caT TiS aLiVe and WeL and yOU
caN HAV iT foR 25 DoLARS Be aT THE BaNStaND To
MoRRER NiTe aT 9 oKLoK IF YOU Do NOT hER HeD
WiL Bee cUT Of THeR NeX Day.

YoRS AffeCKSNTLy

RoBBURS.

P. S. Bee SuRe You CoM ALoNe and If you Say A SiN-
GLe WoRD IT WiL Bee CuT Of NoW.

This document the reader, doubtless, will succeed in deciphering. The intention of him who dictated it was that Miss Marrowphat should come to the Band-stand on the Green, all by herself, at nine

o'clock the following evening, bringing with her the sum of twenty-five dollars, in exchange for which she was to receive back her darling cat. And it must be confessed that young Prettyman had shown no little ingenuity, and cunning, so far in his scheme; and it was altogether likely that Miss Marrowphat, her anxiety for the safety of the maltee outweighing all other sentiments in her breast, would unhesitatingly comply with his conditions.

The letter, duly posted, reached Miss Marrowphat that evening; and her friend, Miss Funnyfeather, who was with her, saw an expression of joy gradually breaking over her face. Miss Marrowphat had barely gotten as far as the postscript, when she jumped up from her chair, and began waving the paper above her head, in the most extravagant manner possible.

"Found! Found!" she cried, and then, dropping the letter on the floor, she sat down again, quite overcome with joy.

Miss Felicia picked up the paper and read it over for herself. When she had finished it, she asked Miss Marrowphat what she was going to do about it.

"Do about it?" exclaimed the latter. "What *should* I do about it? I shall do as the letter says. I would rather give twenty-five *hundred* dollars, than that my pet should have her beautiful head cut off!"

"Humph!" remarked Miss Felicia. But she said nothing more. She knew her friend too well to attempt to change her purpose in a matter so near her heart as this. Miss Felicia had a notion of her own, however, as we shall presently see.

At half past eight o'clock the next evening, it was raining a little, and the night was dark as a pocket.

"So much the better," remarked young Prettyman, as he and Tommy Alsop climbed over the back-garden fence. "Nobody'll see us."

And, indeed, if anybody had seen them they would have been unusually sharp-eyed, to have recognized them. Young Prettyman had on four coats, a heavy pair of boots and a tall stove-pipe hat, and his face was adorned with the fiercest possible moustache and whiskers of burnt-cork; while Tommy had dressed himself in his father's winter ulster, and put on a fur cap and muffler that entirely concealed his head and face, and made him look twice as big as he was. Save that they were a little deficient in point of stature, they looked, for all the world, like a pair of desperate outlaws, taken directly from the first-page illustration of a New York story-paper.

Young Prettyman slung his club over his shoulder and strode off boldly into the night, while his less reckless comrade shifted the covered basket from his right hand to his left and reluctantly trotted after.

Arrived at the Green, the chief conspirator led the way directly toward where the band-stand might be supposed to be. It was very dark and they could scarcely see each other. Looking across toward Miss Marrowphat's cottage, they perceived a light in the front room as usual.

All at once, however, the tall outline of the band-stand appeared before them, a large circular platform some eight feet from the ground, with a railing around it and supported by a single pillar in the centre. In years past there had been a set of steps leading up to a trap-door in the platform, but of late, the band-stand not having been used for a long while, these had been taken away.

Young Prettyman posted Tommy out in the darkness, some twenty feet from the band-stand.

"There!" said he. "You are to stay here with the basket, and not make a single sign or sound until I whistle."

"All right," assented Tommy, with a slight quaver in his voice.

Then young Prettyman went back to the band-stand; and almost immediately thereafter, Miss Marrowphat's front door was seen to open and a female figure came out, raised an umbrella and then closed the door again. Tommy's heart beat so loudly he was afraid it would be heard all over the

village; but his companion paced up and down in the rain, quite undaunted, impatiently stroking his burnt-cork moustache, and waiting for Miss Marrowphat to appear. Then suddenly, Tommy, listening with all his ears, heard voices and knew that the lady had arrived.

"O, Sir!" were the first words that Tommy could catch distinctly, "where is my darling Cat? O, give her back to me at once!"

"Have you brought the money?" demanded young Prettyman, in a voice as deep and gruff as he could possibly assume.

"Yes, I have it," was the eager answer. "But where is my Cat? O, where is she?"

Young Prettyman put his first and fourth finger between his lips and gave a low, shrill whistle, at which Tommy picked up his basket and slowly came forward.

"She is here — in this basket," said young Pretty-



AN UNLOOKED-FOR OCCURRENCE.

man, taking the basket. "Now give us the money — quick!"

And at that instant, as if to confirm his words and probably instinctively aware of her mistress's presence, Angy gave vent to a long, heart-rending cry which Miss Marrowphat recognized at once. With trembling hands the lady began feeling in her pocket for her purse, and, drawing it forth, was about to hand young Prettyman a roll of bills, when suddenly a muffled sound was heard directly over-

her?" and he turned sharply on young Prettyman.

"You stoop down here and I'll tell you," said the latter. "I don't care to have everybody know."

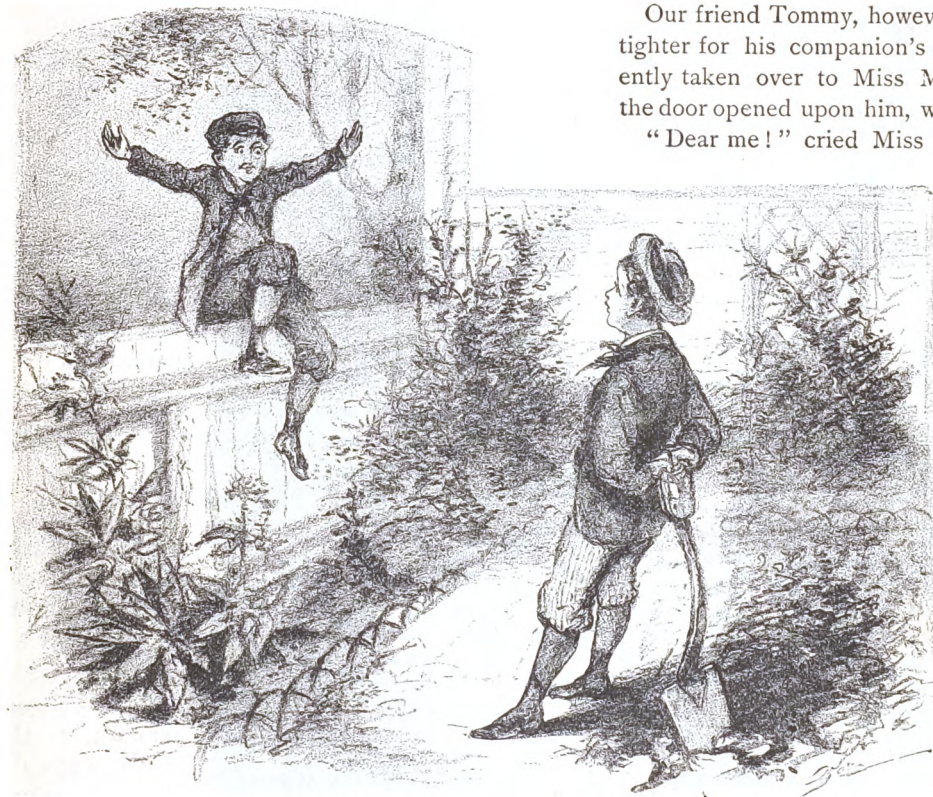
So the unsuspecting constable, little dreaming with what an artful young being he had to deal, bent over and put his ear close to young Prettyman's mouth. The next instant that young gentleman, with a skillful jerk, had suddenly extricated himself from the grasp of the Law and was skurrying away into the darkness, where it would have been folly to pursue him.

Our friend Tommy, however, was only held all the tighter for his companion's escape, and being presently taken over to Miss Marrowphat's piazza, and the door opened upon him, was at once recognized.

"Dear me!" cried Miss Funnyfeather (who had opened the door). "If it ain't Squire Alsop's boy Tommy! Who'd 'a' thought it!"

"You naughty boy! How *could* you steal my Angelina!" cried Miss Marrowphat. But she was too overjoyed at the recovery of her cat to be very angry.

"Well," said Constable Roper, who was a pretty good natured man, and who was dependent upon Tommy's father for a great many profitable jobs. "I guess I'd better take



TELLING TOMMY ALL ABOUT IT!

him over to the Squire, and let *him* punish him."

So Tommy, in the most humiliating manner, was led homeward; and when his father heard what he had done, he gave him a good talking to, and sentenced him to two weeks imprisonment at hard labor in the back garden.

As for his associate in crime, Tommy obstinately refused from first to last, to reveal his name, which loyalty was repaid by young Prettyman's coming and sitting on the fence the day after the circus, and driving poor Tommy nearly distracted, by telling him all about it.

head, and then, all in an instant, our two young adventurers became aware that a *man* was standing beside them and that a heavy hand had been laid upon the shoulder of each.

"Needn't hurry to come down, Tom," the well known voice of Mr. Roper, the Town Constable, was heard to say, as though speaking to some one above. "It's nothin' but a couple of boys, I guess." And then, addressing the boys themselves, he went on, "Wal, young gen'lman, this here's a purty how'd ye do! Yer'd better keep yer money, Miss Marrowphat — an' here's yer cat. What's your name, young-